



# THE INQUIRER

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The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians



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Blueprint for Unitarian growth  
The scourge of modern slavery  
What memory can do

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## Revels for Rebels

It's time for  
Rising Green

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# THE INQUIRER

**The Unitarian and Free Christian Paper**

Established in 1842, The Inquirer is the oldest nonconformist religious newspaper.

**“To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition.”**

From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001

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**Editor:** M Colleen Burns MA  
46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich  
NR4 6UF T: 01603 505281  
**E:** [inquirer@btinternet.com](mailto:inquirer@btinternet.com)  
**Copy editor:** Sarah Reynolds  
**Cover:** Photo by free-photos via Pixabay

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**Write to:** Steven Bisby  
71 Earlesmere Avenue, Balby, Doncaster,  
DN4 0QD T: 07764 486711  
**E:** [admin@inquirer.org.uk](mailto:admin@inquirer.org.uk)

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**Find out more about Unitarians**  
The General Assembly, Essex Hall  
1-6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY  
**T:** 0207 2402384  
**E:** [info@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:info@unitarian.org.uk)

**[www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk)**

## Inquiring Words...

**14 June, the second anniversary of Grenfell**

It was not 'the poor' who died in the Grenfell fire: it was our brothers and sisters.

**Brother Joseph Emmanuel, Society of St Francis, preaching at Oxford Unitarians**

We affirm a continuing hope –  
That out of every tragedy  
the spirit of individuals shall rise  
to build a better world.

**Leonard Mason (1912-1995), Unitarian minister in England and Canada**

*From Fragments of Holiness.*  
Review on page 5

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## Is it a protein reaction?

**Unitarian Scientist Simon Hardy asks why the natural world has such a deep effect on we humans.**

I do not think I understand the meaning of the word *spiritual*, but my new and first-ever pair of prescription sunglasses may have given me some insight. The old railway, now cycle path that I bounce along to my work glows with the vigour of urgent, unruly plant life in colours subtly new and unexpected.

Mysterious greens, yellows vividly old gold, pinks faded and matured make work seem less important, so I stop to ponder my response. Why does this loveliness tug at me so? I understand, since life's key is protein, that my proteins are responding to the effects of those around me. And proteins have their own beauty, not merely that of their occasionally weird symmetries, but a supreme intellectual beauty.

Each atom of the thousands in one molecule is precisely placed by a turmoil of balanced weak forces so that the molecule may do its job: an apparent triumph of design. And did this arise blindly, through occasional tiny errors frozen by selection, the huge majority discarded? And how did it begin? And why do I respond to Nature with this strange yearning, this 'calm so deep'?

But it's not all calm, more like a huge excitement bubbling in my depths, too far down to analyse. Is it my proteins creating God in me? Why? I start euphorically greeting bewildered strangers. Does this response enhance the survival of my genes? I don't see how! I don't see why!

**From *The Unitarian Life, voices from the Past and Present*: Lindsey Press: 2008**



Claire MacDonald  
launches a new column:  
'Rising Green'.

# To bring a brand new day

My foot carries days of the old into new, our dreaming shows us the way.  
Wondrous our faith settles deep in the earth, rising green to bring a new day.  
Rising green, rising green, rising green to bring a new day.  
Carolyn McDade

We are in a season of rising. We rise. We will rise. This is the political refrain of the day — and it is a refrain with deep spiritual and environmental roots. *Still I Rise*, as Maya Angelou says in her resounding poem of resistance and joy. As I have carried the words of *Rising Green* in my heart and head it has felt more and more appropriate as the title of a column on Unitarianism and ecology. One that begins, this early June, in a cool and cloudy late spring. For spring also rises. To spring is to rise. A spring tide rises. Spring itself rises from the dark days of winter, as it did this year, in bluebell filled woods and dandelion specked parks, and now with poppies and early roses.

## New column for *The Inquirer*

*Rising Green* is a column about Unitarianism and the environment. This is its first outing — more essay than column this time, but (I promise) shorter in future. It's called *Rising Green* after the hymn of the same name by Carolyn McDade. If her name feels familiar but you are not sure why, check *Sing Your Faith*, numbers 24 and 148. Her best known hymn is *Spirit of Life* (24), one that might almost be said to be our movement anthem. Too free spirited to be a signed up Unitarian, McDade has instead been an inspiration to Unitarians. *Rising Green*, like so many of her hymns, feels prophetic. A sign of what the poet Joanna Macy calls 'active hope'. Carolyn McDade wrote *Rising Green* in 1980 in the midst of earlier concerns about the environment. Her own green spirit draws on earlier activists and thinkers, among them Rachel Carson, the author of *Silent Spring*, scientist, conservationist, and lobbyist. Carson died from cancer aged 56 on 25 April 1964. In 2014 Polly Higgins, the Scottish barrister, author of *Eradicating Ecocide*, and an envi-

"For spring also rises.  
To spring is to rise. A  
spring tide rises. Spring  
itself rises from the dark  
days of winter, as it did  
this year."

ronmental activist deeply connected to the current environmental activism who lobbied the United Nations Law Commission to recognise ecocide as an international crime, gave a lecture to mark the 50th anniversary of Carson's death. Earlier this year, in the middle of her own life of active hope, Polly Higgins was given a terminal diagnosis. She died in Stroud on 21 April 2019, aged 50, from cancer. Her funeral was on 3 May. I want to declare this column open by honouring Rachel Carson and Polly Higgins. This is why. While we are faced every day with the climate emergency, returning to the work of Rachel Carson reminds me of

the tragedy of losing our bio-diversity. Her magnificent and world-changing book *Silent Spring* (1962) has 'ecology' at its centre. Not just environmental devastation but the germ of the way we can approach what we are faced with, and so commit to active hope — that is, the idea that the parts are related to the whole and that all things in existence are in this together. I see this as a spiritual understanding of the environment as a living connected intelligent system.

## Dwelling on earth, our home

In Greek 'eco' is the word for dwelling. We dwell here on the earth; it is our home. The great Unitarian thinker Buckminster Fuller called that home 'spaceship earth' — our *Blue Boat Home* perhaps, as the hymn reminds us. The climate emergency is the result of our actions — but so is the loss of habitat and bio-diversity. A green spirituality asks us to care for the earth that is our home, not to put ourselves in dominion or control over it but to walk humbly and lightly if we can — and to make space for all and to welcome all. As Rachel Carson said in the early 1960s, 'Now, I truly believe, that we in this generation, must come to terms with nature, and I think we're challenged as man-

Continued on page 6 >



# Modern slavery

## A many-faceted crime

### More than 11,000 victims in UK alone

By Paul Wheeler

More than 40.3 million people are estimated to be trapped in some form of modern slavery in the world today. 11,700 victims are estimated to be in the UK of whom 5,145 potential victims were found in 2017.

Modern slavery is an umbrella term for all forms of slavery, trafficking and exploitation. At the core of the crime is deception. Survivors of modern slavery tell stories of being sold the prospect of a better life. They are often vulnerable, coming from areas where there is little possibility of work. They are offered a job, a chance to make money and to build a new life for themselves. Those who offer these opportunities may even organise their travel to a different country, controlling every aspect of their trip. The job they are offered turns out not to exist and instead they are forced to work in difficult and degrading conditions, with little or no pay. The threat of violence, to themselves or their families, hangs over them and traps them in their situation. Even if their trafficker does not physically control them, a mistrust of authority may stop them from going to the police.

Modern slavery knows no borders, and people of all ages and races can be victims. The 5,145 potential victims referred to the National Crime Agency (NCA) in 2017 came from 116 different countries, the most common of which were Albania, Vietnam and the UK. Referrals to the NCA are categorised in one of four forms of exploitation:

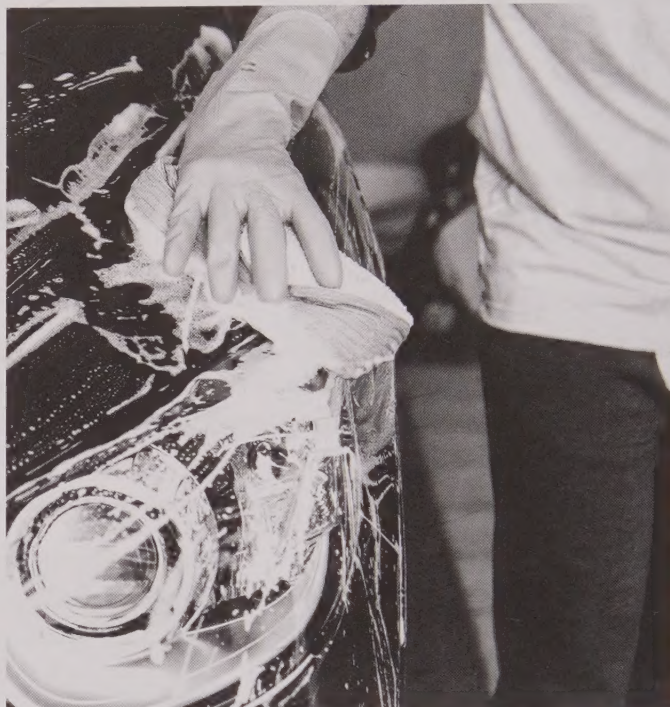
- Labour exploitation.
- Sexual exploitation.
- Domestic servitude.
- Organ-harvesting.

Victims of forced labour are made to work long hours, often in hard conditions, without relevant training and equipment. They are forced to hand over the majority, if not all, of their wages to their traffickers. In many cases victims are subjected to verbal threats or violence and often large numbers of people are kept in the same house in horrific conditions. Cases of labour exploitation have been widely reported in car washes and nail bars, but this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Victims have been found in the manufacturing, entertainment, travel, farming, and construction industries. Labour exploitation can sometimes mean criminal exploitation, where victims are forced to commit crimes. For example where they are forced to pickpocket, or made to work on a cannabis farm tending the plants.

Sexual exploitation involves any non-consensual or abusive sexual acts performed without a victim's permission. This includes prostitution, escort work, or pornography. Women, men and children of both sexes can be victims and many are controlled through violence and abuse.

Victims of domestic servitude are forced to work in a private household. Their movement will often be restricted and they will perform household tasks like childcare and house-keeping over long hours and for little, if any, pay. In rare circumstances where victims receive a wage it will be heavily reduced, as they are often charged for food and accommodation. Victims will lead isolated lives and have little or no unsupervised freedom. Their own privacy

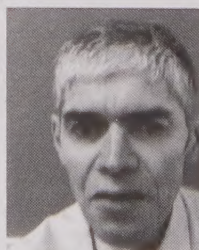


**Shown above:** Some car wash workers are victims of slavery.  
*Photo by Sasin Tipchai*

and comfort will be minimal, often sleeping on a mattress on the floor.

Organ harvesting is one aspect of the trade in human organs and involves any organ that can be removed and used, of which kidneys and livers are the most commonly traded. Traffickers may force or deceive their victims into giving up an organ, or victims may agree to sell an organ but are not paid or paid less than the promised price. Sometimes victims are treated for an illness, which may or may not exist, and their organs are removed without their knowledge.

Our ability to help combat some of these forms of exploitation is probably very little, but it is likely that we will encounter situations where labour exploitation is involved in providing goods or services we might buy. What then can we do ensure that our actions do not support it? I would suggest taking a moment to ask yourself the question – is this thing or service I am considering buying too cheap to be true? If the answer is 'yes', someone involved in providing it is most likely being exploited.



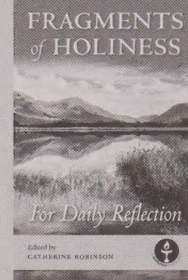
**Paul Wheeler**

Paul Wheeler writes on behalf of the Unitarian General Assembly's Penal and Social Affairs Panel. He is a member of Unitarian Meeting Bristol.



# REVIEW

## Gems to be savoured



### Fragments of Holiness

Edited by Catherine Robinson: Lindsey Press, 2019  
ISBN: 978-0-85319-091-2

By Maria Curtis

This is a delightful collection of short reflective texts, one for every day of the year. It provides a useful resource for worship leaders or for personal contemplation. Readings include those by Unitarians of the past and present, and texts from other faiths and humanist philosophers, writers and poets. There are many gems to be savoured in this collection, ranging from the profound to the practical, the serious to the humorous; the sorrowful to the celebratory.

Fragments of Holiness is a book for dipping into rather than for reading from cover to cover. Random selection of pieces always leads to something interesting and enjoyable. In fact, although some commemorative days, such as Remembrance Sunday and Holocaust Memorial Day are marked, much of the selection seems quite arbitrary. This has advantages and disadvantages. Serendipity can generate pleasant surprises. On the other hand, if the reader were searching for something in particular, this might be hard to find without knowledge of the date or the author. The book is not theme-based and there is no subject index, so it is a matter of pot luck.

The editor suggests that the readings might form part of a daily practice of personal reflection or perhaps as a resource for group discussion and contemplation. The variety of the extracts means that they can be applied in a range of ways, especially in the context of worship. They serve to reinforce our Unitarian values with themes of love and forgiveness; the oneness and interconnectedness of all life; wonder and reverence at creation; the pursuit of peace and justice; finding the sacred in the ordinary; and compassion and gratitude. (The final reading is by Richard Holloway on Gratitude.)

This book would be a valuable addition to any church library or personal collection. It fully reflects the words of Sarah York from which its title is taken:

We receive fragments of holiness,  
glimpses of eternity, brief moments of insight.  
Let us gather them up for the precious gifts that they are,  
and, renewed by their grace, move boldly into the unknown.  
The Rev Dr Maria Curtis is minister with Horsham Unitarians. Catherine Robinson, editor of Fragments of Holiness is a member of the Oxford Unitarian congregation. Published by The Lindsey Press, London for the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, the book is available (price £9 + p&p) from the Unitarian head office at Essex Hall in London. (Tel. 020 240 2384, Monday-Friday 10 am to 5 pm)

## Governance Seminar 6th July 2019



An opportunity to explore how the recent status of Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIO) could be a governance model for chapels and congregations in the future. Speakers include community building experts, legal opinion and those who have made the move.

Venue: Birmingham New Meeting, B16 8BL

Date: Saturday 6th July 2019

Time: 10.30am for 11.00 start – 3.30pm finish

Booking deadline: 29th June

Advance booking is essential.

For more information and to book, please contact:

Simon Bland at Unitarian General Assembly,  
Essex Hall, 1 – 6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY

Phone: 0115 888 2955 / Email: [sbland@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:sbland@unitarian.org.uk)



# Fearing a Silent Spring

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kind has never been challenged before to prove our maturity and our mastery, not of nature, but of ourselves.'

Rachel Carson was a marine biologist and a writer. Born in 1907 she wrote at first about the sea in *Under the Sea-Wind*, *The Sea Around Us* and *The Edge of the Sea* (published in 1941, 1951 and 1958 respectively.) She taught at the University of Maryland and worked part time for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service when she began to become very worried about the pesticides that had come into wide agricultural use post-war and were being sold to the American public and more widely as solution to bigger crops.

## A tiny part of the vast universe

The first chapter of *Silent Spring* imagines that the rising of spring stops. No birds, no green shoots, poison, death and an unnatural silence lie over everything. She imagines a world in which biodiversity has been destroyed. 'We still haven't become mature enough', she said, 'to think of ourselves as only a tiny part of a vast and incredible universe. Man's attitude toward nature is today is critically important simply because we have now acquired a fateful power to alter and destroy nature.'

Rachel Carson died of an aggressive breast cancer. In the months before she died she testified before President John F Kennedy's Science Advisory Committee. The committee issued its report on 15 May, 1963, largely backing Carson's scientific claims. By the time she died she was famous. She had suffered huge and very aggressive and misogynist retorts to her work from agribusiness but she helped to change policy in the United States — and her extraordinary book had wider and wider repercussions helping to generate the environmental movement. She died in Silver Spring, Maryland. Silver Spring was the first place I lived in the USA and it is named for the spring discovered there by the writer and abolitionist politician Francis Preston Blair in 1840. That rising spring. On the internet I found a sermon about Carson by a Unitarian minister, Diane Teichert, from Paintbranch, Maryland, a town very close to Silver Spring. In early 1964 Carson pursued one last radiotherapy treatment. In her sermon the Rev Teichert said that, while recovering, Carson placed a call to the Rev Duncan Howlett, Minister of All Souls Church Unitarian in Washington DC. She asked him if he would hold a memorial service for her at All Souls when the time came. He gave her his word. Diane Teichert went on to say, 'Carson wasn't a member of All Souls. But they had met through a long-time friend of hers who was active there.

"At times I just want the generous shelter of the wings of the God I can't believe in but whose care I desire. I want just to slip underneath those ample wings and wait for the storm to pass."

Howlett preached about *Silent Spring* after it was published. So he would not have been surprised by the phone call in which she asked him to do her memorial service. However, it didn't happen as she wished. On the day of her death, April 14, 1964, her brother Robert took control and planned an elaborate state funeral at the Washington National Cathedral, with dignitaries as pallbearers and no memorial remarks. Unbeknownst to Robert, though, Rachel's friend and literary agent contacted the Rev Howlett. According to the biographer, he 'willingly cast aside the Sunday sermon he had planned for the memorial he had promised.' So, on the Sunday morning after her death, her closest friends gathered at All Souls to honor Rachel.'

At that memorial service Hewlett read from a letter that Carson had written to her friend Dorothy Freeman when she was close to death. It's a postscript to a trip they took together, when 'Dorothy had driven Rachel to a favorite spot on the shore. It was a warm clear day and they spent hours watching drifts of monarch butterflies feeding on milkweed.'

## Remember the monarch

In her sermon Diane Teichert quotes the letter that Hewlett read. In it Carson says this:

'But most of all I shall remember the Monarchs, that unhurried westward drift of one small winged being after another, each drawn by some invisible force. We talked a little about their migration, their life history. Did they return? We thought not; for most, at least, this was the closing journey of their lives. But it occurred to me this afternoon, remember, that it had been a happy spectacle, that we had felt no sadness when we spoke of the fact that there would be no return. And rightly — for when any living thing has come to the end of its life cycle we accept that end as natural. For the Monarch, that cycle is measured in a known span of months. For ourselves, the measure is something else, the span of which we cannot know. But the thought is the same: when that intangible cycle has run its course it is a natural and no unhappy thing that a life comes to its end. That is what those brightly fluttering bits of life taught me this morning. I found a deep happiness in it—so, I hope, may you.'

The Monarch butterfly is not a UK native. It feeds on milkweed, a plant we do not have here. It is a large migratory butterfly, and flies for some of the longest journeys known. It has also been devastated in the past 20 years by Roundup, that pesticide made by the Monsanto company that Carson was so concerned



“This new world movement for change, grounded in ensuring the earth’s survival, needs spiritual activism.”

**Photo left:** by Claire MacDonald



about. There is though a postscript. We see and welcome the Monarch as a rare migrant here in the UK. In 2014 it was sighted in large numbers. In 2016 its numbers were rebounding in the USA. 'In 2015 the US Fish and Wildlife Service announced that it would provide a total of \$3.2 million to support monarch conservation, but that total is only enough to restore 1 percent of the habitat that has been lost, and will not address the most critical habitat: milkweed in agricultural areas. There is too little potential habitat outside of cropland to support a viable monarch population. Corn and soybeans dominate the Midwest landscape — the heart of monarch breeding range — leaving little area in roadsides, pastures and other land where milkweed can grow.'

**'I am Willing'**

The work of Rachel Carson is not over. She left it to us to continue. The faith deeply present in today's environmental movement is that we can make a difference and that we have little time left. We can make a difference by public action, by lobbying and by adding our voices together. Not to do so — as Unitarian singer and composer Holly Near writes, in her song *I am Willing* — 'would dishonour those who went before us.' We are all in this together, as Buckminster Fuller said. I am not sure I need to go on, but here's the thing. Ecology is about the relationship of the individual organism to the whole. The ecology of Unitarianism itself balances there — in the rocking back and forth between respect for the individual conscience and the needs of community. Somehow that speaks to this human moment with absolute clarity and so I want to add that I need the spiritual nourishment of *Rising Green*, and of all those songs of hope and joy, as well as the stories of women and men who went before us, knowing we would need the place they had made for us to step into. In bluebell woods, in city squares, on occupied bridges, in prisons and places of worship. I need their footprints and examples because I too am afraid. At times I just want the generous shelter of the wings of the God I can't believe in but whose care I desire. I want just to slip underneath those ample wings and wait for the storm to pass. Yet I know that we are here, in the space where sacred meets social, so that we can do together what we cannot do apart. Polly Higgins invited us all to become earth protectors. Just before she died she told George Monbiot that 'there are millions who care so much and feel so powerless about the future, and I would love to see them begin to understand the power of this one, simple law to protect the Earth — to realise it's possible, even straightforward. I wish I could live to see a million Earth

protectors standing for it — because I believe they will.'

**Resistance and joy**

There was dancing on Waterloo Bridge at the climate change protests as well as moments of challenge, arrests and confrontation. There was conversation and dialogue, food and flowers. I started calling it 'revels for rebels'. And there were songs — often songs I have heard from many marches over the years — punk, folk and reggae. As I was writing this essay I was listening to the BBC World Service reports from Khartoum. The occupiers of squares and roads were also playing *I Shot the Sheriff* and I smiled to myself that Bob Marley should also be there, in spirit, another resounding emblem of resistance and joy. I hold them in my prayers today, the change makers of Sudan, and all peoples gathering in love against hate, in solidarity against division, in active hope.

This new world movement for change, grounded in ensuring the earth's survival, needs spiritual activism. I found, on those bridges and streets, a deep desire for engagement with a vision that is shaped by sacred, enchanted, spirit focused, thoughtful, rational, well informed, activism. That is what I am going to be writing about in this column, but for now, I want to end with this little prayer. It's one I wrote a couple of years ago for May Day. *May our May days be many. May we as religious liberals find ways to make connections between justice and love, honouring those who fought for our flourishing and who decorated their banners with garlands. May we live between old stories and new, in peace and joy, borne into the future by the loving hands of those who went before us, who struggled to make our world new and who are always with us this day, in this world and for all time. Amen*

**Sources:**

We can all sign up to be earth protectors here: [www.stopeccocide.earth](http://www.stopeccocide.earth)  
 The Monarch butterfly article is here: <https://bit.ly/21BkQ7F>  
 Polly Higgins' obituary is here: <https://bit.ly/2YObw4q>  
 The Rev Diane Teichart's sermon is here: <https://bit.ly/2VXIePn>

Claire MacDonald



The Rev Dr Claire MacDonald is minister at Lewisham Unity, London. She is also thinker-in-residence at the Live Art Development Agency. Reach her via email at: [justrevclaire@gmail.com](mailto:justrevclaire@gmail.com)



# Maybe we shouldn't all BOGOF



Photo above by Bluebudgie

## Just one old lady doing her best

I loved this year's Unitarian General Assembly meetings. The Anniversary Service was admirable. The Rev Dr Maria Curtis delivered a carefully crafted, clearly delivered, coherent expression of the environmental problems currently facing us. Unfortunately, I knew all that already. What I desperately need to know is: What do I have to do about it?

We are recycling everything we can recycle. Our paper, glass, plastic bottles, cans and food waste go into special containers which are collected on a Monday. To show willing, as we live out in the country and there is little traffic, I also collect plastic bottles and cans from the grass verges on Castle Vale Road as I come back from shopping. Cardboard is packed in a box and taken to the car park in Rhayader where there is a collection point. Anything else remotely recyclable or reusable goes to Llandrindod Wells but not on a Monday.

The government has told us to turn down our thermostats to 17 – can do. Eat less meat – we are vegetarians. Drive an electric car – I don't think that I can afford one right now, much as I would like to do so.

But somehow I don't think my little efforts are going to make much of an impact on the climate crisis. So should I travel many miles to join in one of the Extinction Rebellion demonstrations? Sorry. I know I am being a complete wimp here but I went on a demo back in the 60s and got a huge attack of claustrophobia. Lifts may do it for you; crowds of people do it for me.

The truth is that we need to deliver Maria's sermon to the managing directors and executive presidents of the world's most polluting industries. And then we have to be prepared to pay more for certain things as certain industries clean up their act; and pay more, much more to support those people who find themselves even more disadvantaged.

We also need to think seriously about ourselves. We wander round our supermarkets with their BOGOF and 2-for-the-price-of-1 offers without thinking about the impact that cheap food may have on the world. We have, thank goodness, recognised that dairy farmers need to receive a living wage. We have far to go, however, before the British admit the importance of healthy and more expensive food. We spend 8.7% of our household expenditure on food. Even so we buy a lot of expensive food with high air miles. France spends 13.6%. Only the USA spends less than us.

Can we reverse the trend? Refuse to buy food from Kenya or Morocco? Oh dear. Now I am hit by a wave of concern lest this destroy their economies. They may desperately need us to buy their strawberries in November. Can somebody tell me? Which is worse? Buying food with high air miles that will make

### DORIS' COLUMN

By Dorothy Houghton



our climate worse or not supporting a potentially third world country?

You are saying: What has this to do with Unitarianism? And I am saying: We are concerned with social action. As Maria's address made absolutely clear, we cannot ignore the problems currently facing the planet: 'There is a lot at stake – nothing less than the future of our species.' Faced with a problem of this magnitude then social action can be the only response. Perhaps the Rev Dr Curtis, seeing no sign within the movement that we are aware of the problem, decided to, as it were, hit us over the head with a gigantic hammer. She quotes five points from Joanna Macy's book, *Active Hope*. These are not very concrete. But you can, feeling grateful for the wonderful world in which we live, join together and use the 'juicy, enlivening power of the imagination' to see what you, you as a congregation, as a church, can do.

This is something I found online:

Community Garden – Woodlands Methodist Church  
See: <https://bit.ly/2l6SMqd>

Community Garden – We are creating a community garden for everyone to enjoy, young and old, sighted and visually impaired, able and those with mobility difficulties.

Our community garden uses the lovely green space at the rear of the church and started in 2014. We now have 6 raised beds for fruit and vegetables, 14 fruit trees and work on a sensory garden is almost finished.

And note that these plants will be beneficial for insects – fast disappearing. If you haven't room for a garden, one sedum will do.

I love Andy's idea of adding an earth ritual to our chalice ritual. I wonder if the flower should be a sunflower, which can grow so triumphantly high.

Sorry, I am a little, fat, old lady with good intentions floundering here in this world of imminent extinction. I know that I will be dead before the final curtain falls but if there is anything I can do to help the rest of you, just tell me. However, I am not, no matter how much you beg, drinking green tea.

*Dorothy Houghton is a Unitarian service leader who lives in Wales.*



Memory is a  
mystery  
to me

# Remembering awakens gratitude

As the silence came to an end during the meditation I was sharing with my Tuesday morning friends, I felt overcome by a beautiful sense of peace within myself and for all of life. I felt awake to the moment I was in and connected to all of eternity. As the feeling flowed over me a memory awakened within my being. I was taken back to a childhood time, the first year at junior school.

I re-felt, re-sensed a memory of being sat on the floor with my classmates listening to the teacher reading the end of day story. It was a lovely feeling, as I re-felt the experience. There was not really a picture in my mind, other than a very vague one of the room, which even now I cannot see in my mind's eye. I can't even picture the teacher or even my classmates. What I remember is that lovely sense of well being. As I sat there, awakening from the silence, that Tuesday morning, I re-awakened that feeling, the experience re-incarnated in me. Memory is a mystery to me. The way I remember my own life and people I share my life with has changed many times. The changes seem to coincide with the way I have experienced and understood my own humanity, another mystery. The truth is that my life is made up of those lives that went before me, my life is built on their lives and no doubt those lives that follow me, their lives will be built on mine. The ancestors who walked before me, and those that follow me, are actually a part of me. I find that incredibly humbling.

I have never witnessed the birth of a child, I am not a parent. That said, I can still re-feel the incredible experience of first seeing my youngest sister Natalie as well as nieces and nephews, truly awe-filled moments. I remember powerfully how it felt visiting my grandad those last few times before he died. Seeing the lifeless bodies of my father and little Ethan, that incredible outpouring and heart-breaking love as it felt like the whole of my inner being was being torn to shreds.

I have also been at the bedside of several congregants as they have come to the end of their lives and witnessed the incredible power of shared love as I have been in the presence of their loved ones. The love experienced in such moments is overwhelmingly powerful.

These memories are etched in my soul. I cannot truly visualise them, they are blurred a bit like looking through frosted glass. They are like the spiritual experiences I have had, when everything that surrounds the object of my focus appears frosted over, and what is at the centre becomes illuminated.

While I cannot visualise the memory, it feels so alive in my inner being that I can embody the memory. It is somehow more real than reality itself. It is a deeper and thicker kind of real.

## FROM NOTHING TO EVERYTHING

By Danny Crosby



I cannot remember how many things I have forgotten this week. We all forget things and even more as we get older. And then there is dementia, and its cruellest form Alzheimer's. A disease which attacks the cortex of the brain forming bundles of tangled plaque that inhibit conversation between the neurons; as it takes away a person's identity and history as aspects of their humanity drift away. The longer we live the more likely we are to become one of its victims.

Now while the Alzheimer's sufferer forgets, those who loved them never let them go. Those who shared memories with them hold their love, those feelings are felt in that deeper place that cannot be destroyed by time. Love is eternal. It is immortal. Life awes me every single day. It humbles me also. The more I learn, the less things make any sense. Every day I have a growing sense of how truly ignorant I am. Nothing makes sense to me. I have no idea why I feel what I feel or why my mind remembers and forgets things. Clever people try to explain these things to me, but they seem to get it even less than I do. The sum of the parts they describe do not begin to scratch the surface of the whole.

That said, I am so grateful to be a part of this incredible mystery that is life itself; that I get to share it with the people I do; that I get to experience the sensations of these memories coming to life in my body and spirit, enhancing my experience of life today.

I am grateful to have experienced this the most amazing trip that anyone could wish to be on. Thank you for being a part of it.

*The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Urmston and Altrincham.*



# A blueprint for Unitarian growth

Unitarians want growth. But growth has proved elusive for decades. We've said to ourselves, 'We're splendid, but people don't know about us. What can we do to tell them and bring them in?' With little result.

How about asking instead: 'People who are in harmony with our spirituality, where are they?' – and then: 'How can we be in that place, and attract them there, where they are?'

## By Wade Miller-Knight

Among British middle-class adults aged under 40, churchgoers who are discontented yet wanting a better church – the main source of Unitarian converts for the past 200 years – are a rare breed. Growth cannot come from people who already have significant experience of a church.

Surveys show that most young(ish) adults are either 'spiritual but not religious' or 'neither spiritual nor religious'. Growth will not come from the latter, either, as they are in the main stream of materialists in our society. Our best hope for new, younger, Unitarians is among spiritual but not religious people. Those who are genuinely spiritual are consciously at an early stage of what many call their 'spiritual journey', and would love to take advantage of some guidance, companionship, and support.

## iPads at breakfast

Where are they looking? Some are pursuing primarily personal development, participating perhaps in 'Yes Groups', or enduring intensive 'More to Life' weekends. They may attend talks by self-styled inspirational or motivational speakers such as Daniel Goleman and Tony Robbins. They eat TED Talks on their iPads for breakfast. Mostly, they will not feel the prospect of embarking on a sustained spiritual quest is attractive.

For others, however, that prospect is exactly what attracts them. Perhaps they do rituals on ancient sacred sites like Stonehenge and Glastonbury Tor. Perhaps they go on some 'pilgrimages that mix literature, landscape and sacred reading practices' (I quote from the Unitarian General Assembly website's summary of what Elizabeth Slade used to organise before she became our new Chief Officer). If they love weekend workshops or online courses, they may take ones

"Surveys show that most young(ish) adults are either 'spiritual but not religious' or 'neither spiritual nor religious'."

offered by Woodbrooke, the Quaker Study Centre, or go 'exploring ancient thresholds of inspiration' with Caitlin and John Matthews and their organisation [hallowquest.org](http://hallowquest.org), by methods such as 'shamanic practitioner training'.

## Attract them to spiritual practices

The major truth is that they are doing spiritual practices. Could it be that therein lies the accessible potential for us? In an article in *Pagan Dawn*, Christopher Wilkins said people do practices, 'to help us, as developing beings, reach greater heights in our personal journeys'. Inner spiritual advancement requires commitment to

spiritual, not worldly, practices and endeavour. Were we to do practices that are spiritually good, in the spaces where attractive new people already are, would we attract some of them?

Mostly, they are choosing practices to participate in, rather than people to listen to. Meditation is probably the most widespread participatory spiritual practice – and there are many variant ways to meditate. And other possibilities are limitless. The Flamingo Centre in Bristol, for example, boasts 'a unique and exciting range of classes, workshops and courses,' current or recent activities include shamanic drumming, group meditation with movement, mandala drawing, tarot workshops, writing for wellbeing, psychic development, reiki and vibrational healing, a neuro-linguistic programming workshop, kinesiology, and mindfulness. Only parts of the Flamingo Centre's programme are spiritual. It also hosts body-centred therapies, and activities for children. Elsewhere, there are other practices, such as gong baths and sacred chanting – and indeed our own 'heart-and-soul' evenings, and labyrinth walking. Unitarians who want to attract today's spiritual seekers need to be in this field, where the seekers are.

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“Could we develop a substantial and sustainable spiritual practices-based growth-oriented initiative outside those constraining structures?”

*Image left: StockSnap photo*

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### Offer practices and sustaining guidance

As a rule, each spiritual practice is run by a different leader, and there is little or no interaction between people attending one activity and another. Unitarians' potential 'unique selling point' is that we could offer people, by contrast, the more sustaining guidance, companionship and support that can be felt in an integrated participatory spiritual programme, rather than only a single focus such as meditation, or writing for wellbeing, or vibrational healing. (Unitarians are not totally unique: the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) is a Buddhist community with a strong track record of guidance, companionship and support of this kind, from which we could usefully learn. However, NKT has too many traits of a dogmatic religion to be a general role model (or a close competitor) for the kind of network and programme I am imagining.)

I suggest that for it to be integrated, and not just scattered groups of enthusiasts doing their own thing with a Unitarian nametag, we would benefit from agreeing three foundational principles. Principles that summarise our values and spiritual process.

I imagine (and hope) the kinds of Unitarian who might choose to engage in this work mostly agree that we:

- **Trust** intuition, conscience, reason, experiences, and wisdom (i.e. our personal spiritual experiences; and the wisdom of many messages and faiths around the world) – the initial letters spell 'I screw', a nice image for Unitarianism's nature.
- **Live** by humane, liberal, and spiritual, values (in contrast to worldly values such as sex, fame, money, and power over others); and
- **Share** in Unitarian community.

I do not imagine us creating this programme within the existing congregational structure. (Although the Bridport congregation has successfully grown by incorporating these types of activities.) The major problem there is that we behave, and are perceived, as a church. We meet in buildings that look like churches, usually with visible churchlike things in them such as altars and pulpits, organs and Christian cross symbols. We have what we call Sunday services, which sound and feel like church services. We use words like congregation, service, hymn,

sermon, and worship. To younger Britons, such words are spelt 'ir-re-le-vant' and 'b-o-r-i-n-g'. If it looks like a church and it quacks like a church, it is a church – therefore, goodbye!

It is unrealistic to expect mature congregations to change. Loyal Unitarians and their committees sustain the movement we have today. Unitarianism would not exist without them. But could we develop a substantial and sustainable spiritual practices-based growth-oriented initiative outside those constraining structures?

I ask those of us who meditate, engage in heart-and-soul evenings, enjoy weekend workshops, circle or universal-peace dance, walk labyrinths, or otherwise engage in participatory spiritual activities – and who mostly would agree that we too are on a spiritual journey – could we create a network for spiritual practices, under the Unitarian umbrella but with a distinct identity, website and social media presence free from the image and associations of 'church'?

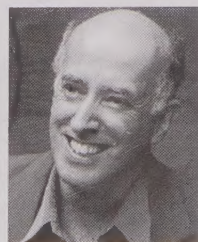
How might such a network do, teach, organise, and promote, practices that spiritual journeyers of this 21st century feel are attractive, spiritually nurturing, and fulfilling?

Most challenging question of all – how might such a network market these activities to non-Unitarians?

And if we would like to have this, and want it to flourish, how might we set our feet moving towards creating it?

Send your thoughts in a letter to The Inquirer: [inquirer@btinternet.com](mailto:inquirer@btinternet.com)

Or join the discussion on the non-public Unitarians facebook page: <https://bit.ly/2VY4ubz>



### Wade Miller-Knight

Wade Miller-Knight is a member of Golders Green Unitarians.



## ICUU met at Manchester

Unitarians from the north welcomed members of the Executive Committee of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU) when they held their in-person meeting at Luther King House in Manchester earlier this year. Along with attendance at Sunday worship in congregations around Manchester the international guests gained a good insight into the British Unitarianism and shared their vision of the work of ICUU in growing our liberal faith.

Derek McAuley



## Faith in Words


### What inspires you?

Share expressions of your faith.

Contribute to The Inquirer's summer edition of creative material.

- Prayers
- Addresses
- Visual art
- Meditations

For more information or to submit material, email: [Inquirer@btinternet.com](mailto:Inquirer@btinternet.com) Or, send typed contributions to the editor's postal address on page 2. Material is due by 10 July

THE  
 INQUIRER

## Ministry Inquiry Day



Would you like to know more about training as a Unitarian & Free Christian Minister and about working with our congregations?

The Ministry Strategy Group will be holding an Inquiry Day for people who are at an early stage of considering this possibility as well as for those who are almost ready to make an application for training. There'll be chance to meet our college tutors, Simon Bland our Ministry & Congregational Support Officer and the Rev Sarah Tinker, Chair of the Interview Panel.

Venue: Birmingham New Meeting, B16 8BL

Date: Saturday 6th July 2019

Time: 10.30am for 11.00 start – 3.30pm finish

Booking deadline: 29th June. Advance booking is essential.

For more information and to book, please contact:

Simon Bland at Unitarian General Assembly,  
Essex Hall, 1 – 6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY  
Phone: 0115 888 2955 / Email: [sbland@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:sbland@unitarian.org.uk)